

CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

Published every Saturday, corner of Ninth and Race st.—Price \$2 per ann. payable quarterly in advance.

VOL. II.

PHILADELPHIA, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1820.

NO. 9.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xiii. 34.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

BRIEF SKETCHES. No. III.

Three hundred and eighteen bishops, and seventeen hundred ecclesiastics were present at the grand council of Nice, over whom presided the emperor of Rome, Constantine the great, but amidst this splendid collection of advocates for the cause, we shall be disappointed if we expect wisdom and charity to clothe their proceedings with the majesty due to them. Memorials were transmitted to Constantine containing accusations of one party against the other, and filled with the rancour of bigotry and selfhood, and the emperor it is said, collected in one heap all the documents and threw them in the fire, telling the ecclesiastics that they should forgive one another as they expected forgiveness.

The doctrine of Arius was next introduced, and denounced, and the author was banished into Illyria. The doctrine of consubstantiality was held up as the true faith. The clergy differed concerning the meaning of the term *ὁμοουσιος*, whether it should be applied to the nature, or persons of the Godhead, but agreed that Christ was not distinct from the Father in substance or essence. The defenders of Arius were few, but possessed of great talents, yet one only persisted in refusing to agree to the decision of the orthodox. The faith was settled thus, "we believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten: begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father, by whom all things were made, both things in heaven, and things on earth; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate, and became man, suffered and rose again the third day, and ascended into the heavens,

and comes to judge the quick and the dead; and in the Holy Ghost; and the catholic and apostolical church doth anathematize those persons who say, that there was a time when the Son of God was not; that he was not before he was born." It is not our place to decide on the correctness or error of the Arian system, its author certainly intended no harm to the cause of his blessed Saviour, and we lament that at so early an age, abuse was substituted for reason, and persecution for the mild spirit professed by Christians.

The Pelagian heresy next rose.—

About the beginning of the 7th century, there arose a man, who changed the current of religious opinion, and nearly deluged the corrupted doctrines of the cross, destitute of that learning derived from books, he had read the human heart and knew its frailty, he united to the greatest acuteness, a prudence which scanned the chances of success; with a judgment matured he was quick in deciding, and acted his purposes with the celerity of lightning, united to these advantages he possessed an eloquence which worked on the feelings of the soul, and directed with its fluency, the impetuosity of his comrades—he had visited Egypt, Syria and Palestine, and beheld mankind as they are modified by the defects or excellencies of government. Emerging from the shades of retirement he propagated in Mecca his religion, but enemies rising here, he was forced to fly to Medina, where his fame had preceded him, multitudes joined the standard of his faith. Thus with no aid but his sword and his talents, did this wonderful man raise a party, which after conquering Asia, attacked the Roman territories, and taught Christians the respect due to a hero: Mahomet knew the heart of man, he placed in time the rewards of his disciples, he allowed plurality of wives, and his followers were certain that houries of celestial beauty, and eternal youth should minister to them in the future heaven; he taught the doc-

trine of fatality, and infused in the minds that contempt of danger and of death, that fortitude in the most trying moments of existence, that hope of a future and blessed being, which is calculated to create that moral courage essential to a soldier, and a follower of the prophet—he taught as an unalterable principle, the belief, "that there is one true God" and did not forget to add, "Mahomet is his prophet."

In about a century, Persia, Syria and Egypt, and a great part of Spain and Africa yielded to the dominion of his successors.—The professors of christianity had lost its spirit, there was little in them to attract men of reason and reflection, they had corrupted the doctrine, and departed from the worship of the living God.—The religion of Mahomet was preferable on many accounts, and tho' it partook of the luxuriant feelings, and loose customs of the East, still it possessed the semblance of truth, in describing one God as the disposer of all events, it chained the sons of ambition to its car of triumph, and upraised the sword as a converting spirit, this caused its influence to spread so wide.

To be continued.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD CONSISTENT WITH HIS JUSTICE.

Continued.

The Father of our spirits is pleased in his word, to represent himself to us frequently under the character both of a Father and of a King, for, "there is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all," saith the apostle. "We are the offspring of God," saith the same inspired penman: and "of Him the whole family in heaven and earth is named."—The title of King, is one of his most usual titles in scripture. He is emphatically called by our Saviour, "the Great King." He is styled "king of heaven," as well

as "king over all the earth," and by the Psalmist, the "glory of his kingdom" is spoken of,—“which is an everlasting kingdom;” and, though the analogy will not hold in all respects between an earthly parent or king, and, “our Father who is in heaven,” or that great “king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,” who hath “prepared his throne in the heavens;” yet, there can be no doubt, in general, but that when these titles are given to God in his word, the design is, to represent him under the character of the *wisest* and *best* of *Fathers*, the *wisest* and *best* of kings; not that of an unreasonable, unnatural, and cruel parent;—not that of an unwise and unreasonable, a cruel and unmerciful king.—No one can doubt of this, we, therefore, from hence conclude, that, *that* wisdom and goodness, which are imperfect in the best of earthly parents and kings, are in perfection in the Most High, and that he governs his great family—his universal kingdom, according to those general rules and maxims which are in themselves at once most wise and most good, such as the wisest and best of kings would govern by; only, as was before intimated, in an infinitely more perfect manner. From whence it evidently follows; that there is not in the great and glorious God, any such distinction between goodness and justice, as has, by many, been supposed. For if any earthly parent were to act according to what that distinction supposes, and to punish his children or subjects, not as goodness and mercy directs, or without a positive good and valuable end, such parent or king would be considered, in so doing, neither wise, nor good, nor even just, but unreasonable and most cruel. What ground have we then to imagine, that there is any such kind of justice in God as is distinct from, or rather opposite to goodness? Does reason suggest any such thing?—No—Do the holy scriptures assert it or suppose it? No!—nothing like it, there is therefore every reason to conclude, that it is a distinction purely of man’s invention. There can I think, be no conceivable fitness, or propriety in inflicting punishment independently of an *end* to be answered thereby. Those terms, when used with reference to punishing transgressors, suppose and refer to some end; otherwise they are unintel-

ligible; and this end must be either positively bad, or positively good, for what is, in every respect indifferent, is an end unworthy even of human, much more of divine wisdom, and to say the all wise and good creator, has a bad or evil end in any thing which he does, were impious indeed! The conclusion from which premises, is too obvious to need mentioning. That God, our heavenly Father, chasteneth and punisheth his children for their *good* only, is evident from numberless passages in scripture, and there is one which deserves a more particular attention here, on account of the reference contained in it to the conduct of earthly parents, who sometimes correct their children only for their own pleasure, whereas God corrects his for their profit—“whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth—we have father’s of our flesh, who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the father of our spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us *after their own pleasure*; but he for our profit, that we might be *partakers of his holiness*.” Heb. xii. 6—12. No man will deny, but that God is at once just and good, in these chastenings. Goodness and justice in him, therefore, are not to be considered as *opposites*. They, in all cases, without exception, are coincident; the latter being only a particular modification of the former, and tending to the positive good of all.

Shall we? can we really suppose, that he who is good to *all*, and “whose tender mercies are over *all* his works, ever punishes his creatures without any good end, with respect to themselves and to the other members of his universal household, and kingdom? would not this be in effect making his creatures miserable, either for no end at all, or for a positively bad and evil one? Would not this be, what is always called unreasonable and cruel among men? To say that the infinitely wise and good God, punishes any of his creatures, merely for his own glory, without any regard to the final individual happiness, and even contrary to the common good of those, to whom he was pleased to give being, appears to me at the best, very irrational. For what glory can possibly redound to any being by acting contrary to the dictates of true good-

ness? It is peculiarly absurd to suppose that *he* who accounts his *goodness* his *glory*, should aim at advancing it by such unmerciful conduct!

The king of heaven and earth, is indeed, an *absolute sovereign*: he has an indisputable right, as well as power to dispose of all his creatures according to his own pleasure. But, it ought not to be inferred from hence, that he is an *arbitrary* being, in that ill sense in which the word arbitrary is used in reference to earthly tyrants, implying that they govern in an unreasonable, unjust, and cruel manner. Though God is, in the highest sense, an absolute sovereign, yet, in this ill sense, he is not certainly an arbitrary being, and it were blasphemy to think him so. The blessed God, though omnipotent, though over all, and not accountable to any, yet exercises no power, no authority, but according to his infinite wisdom and goodness. To act contrary to them, would be to “deny himself,” and to act *contrary* to his own glory, instead of advancing it; both of which are impossible. So that the great and blessed God may, with the strictest propriety, be styled, a sovereignly wise and good being.—If his power and dominion, on the one hand are without bounds, without limits, his wisdom and goodness, are equally unbounded, unlimited, on the other, and no less essential to him, than existence itself, and “let him that glorieth,” saith the most high, “glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exerciseth *loving kindness, judgment and righteousness* in the earth: for in these things I *delight*, saith the Lord.” Jer. ix. 24.

*

Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Saturday, September 30, 1820.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

Philada. Sept. 16, 1820.

Mr. Editor,

In the messenger No. 7 published this day, is a piece from the Universalist Magazine, intitled *Reason and Revelation*, asserting, that “Reason is Revelation’s eldest brother. The book of scripture is the second edition of the book of nature, with most important

additions. By reason we discover the existence of God, and some of his attributes." In the next column, the address to patrons asserts; "The existence of God, and the divine origin of christianity, are the conclusions of reason, and must stand or fall with it."

The piety or sincerity of the writers is not questioned, but there seems good reason to question the truth of these assertions.

Much has been said and written about a thing called *natural religion*, but where is the evidence that such a thing ever actually existed, unless in the foolish imaginations of men? Did any religion of any kind ever exist where there never was any knowledge of revelation, either by tradition or otherwise? On the contrary, *revelation* appears to have been coeval with the existence of man. When God formed man of the dust of the ground, he did not have him to discover his maker by the obductions of his *reason*; but made himself known to Adam by *revelation*. The posterity of Adam could not have been ignorant of revelation; but when God saw that they corrupted themselves, he raised up prophets to recall them to revelation, and to enlarge his communications. It was by *Revelation*, that *Noah*, a preacher of righteousness, prepared an Ark, to the saving of his house. His sons could not be ignorant of revelation, of the truth of which they had such striking evidence. Their descendants could not divest themselves of some knowledge of revelation, however much they might disfigure it by their corruptions; even to this day, the tradition of the flood is spread in various shapes, in perhaps all nations. The corruptions of revelation was the foundation of all the Idolatry in the world; however abominable, Idolatry could no more have existed without a perversion of the knowledge of the true God, which could only come by revelation, than counterfeit Bank notes could have existed without some previous knowledge of the value of the genuine original Bank notes. No such idea could ever have entered into the minds of men in either case, because there would have been nothing to suggest it.

How can it be conceived that reason could discover the existence of God, uninformed by revelation? Our senses make us acquainted with many material objects, and their qualities; but

surely it will not be contended that these are God. We can reason by analogy, but analogical reasoning, without some knowledge of revelation, never can rise beyond material objects and their qualities, for the stream can never, by its natural course, rise higher than the fountain. The works of creation, are said to show the handy work of God, true, but they cannot teach us even that without previous knowledge of revelation; for how can we otherwise know that they ever were created? Did ever any man see the heavens, the earth, mountains, rivers, or seas created? That can only be known by revelation, without which we could not know what they teach. We have still another avenue for information, that is testimony; but the testimony of other men, however much it may exceed in degree our own, must necessarily be the same in kind, for without revelation, they, like us, cannot rise higher than material things and their qualities. There is only one original source of information, respecting the existence and attributes of God, that is, the testimony of God himself; but this testimony is revelation—the only possible way in which we can know any thing of the existence of God, and that what things we perceive in nature, are his works.

What is called *natural religion*, has long been the doctrine of the schools. All the lectures on *natural religion*, and most of those on *moral philosophy*, are only methods of teaching young men to be *deists*. Accordingly those who profess to be *deists*, avail themselves, in their opposition to christianity of the arguments, used by these lecturers, and the lecturers themselves, are incapable, upon their own principles, to refute these arguments, when used by the *deists*. When *deism*, so called, comes to be analyzed, it necessarily results in speculation, and too often in practical Atheism.

Is it to be wondered at, that so many men of no small degree of learning, should be so ignorant of christianity, which can only be learned from revelation; and about which they are so indifferent, when so much care is taken to instruct them in what is called *natural religion*, which, they are taught, is the basis on which christianity is founded, and which, when examined is found to be without any other founda-

tion, but only mere hypothesis, not only without any substantial evidence; but is demonstrably false? What must those who, thus taught, become preachers, do; must they not teach others as they themselves have been taught: may not that be a cause of so much listless indifference, and want of understanding, of the Gospel, in so large a proportion of their hearers?

With great reason, then, does the apostle caution christians, *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy, and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.* Col. ii. 8. T

To the above we reply, that we hope nothing contained in our columns, will ever lead to the supposition, that we are advocates for what is called *natural*, in opposition to revealed religion:—we are fully of opinion that human reason, unaided by a direct revelation from God, would never have arrived at any thing like a knowledge of the real character of the great creator, of his attributes, his laws, and his will in relation to his creature man:—notwithstanding this however, far be it from us to degrade reason so low as it has been attempted to be degraded by many in the christian world;—The possession of it by man, rendered the revelation of God's will necessary—and by it, does he apply that revelation to himself, so as to produce the effect intended by its divine author.

There is, we believe, no unprejudiced mind, who will examine, with attention, the subject, but will admit that "the existence of God, and some of his attributes," are discoverable by reason. It is impossible for a reflecting mind, to look abroad upon creation, and perceive how well every thing in the natural world, is adapted to its end, and not of itself come to the conclusion, that they owe their origin to some great being, mighty in wisdom and in power: Indeed, the contemplation of the anatomical structure of the human system, is almost as convincing a proof of the existence of some cause, infinite in power, in wisdom, and in goodness, as the revealed declaration "*there is a God.*" But, here reason by itself, stops—she cannot proceed a step farther, unaided by the light of revelation.

But, how are we to be convinced that the doctrines of the bible, are the doctrines of revelation—we have not ourselves heard the law promulgated from amid the thunders of Sinai,—we have not been eye-witnesses of the miracles of Jesus, nor heard the voice which proclaimed him “the well beloved son of God,” nor have we heard declared, from his lips of truth, the will of his heavenly Father. How then are we to know that we are not imposed upon by the traditions and fictions of men. I answer, by the exercise of that condemned principle, *reason*—It is it that displays the uncontrovertible evidence of the authenticity of “the only true record”—brings the testimony even of its opponents to establish it, and, by unfolding the excellence of its precepts, and the simple and *rational* nature of all its doctrines, convinces all, whose minds are open to the reception of truth, of its divine origin. There is no mysterious power existing in the bible, enforcing at once upon the reader, a conviction of its truth; on the contrary, it is only by addressing itself, to the reason of mankind, that it establishes itself, as the word of God, so much so, that were we to *discover* any thing in it, contrary to reason, this would of itself be sufficient evidence of its being no part of the original, but an interpolation of man’s wisdom.

Even after we are convinced that the scriptures are a revelation from God, the aid of reason is necessary, in order to understand their contents. Happily for man, it is true that the more important rules and precepts which they set forth for the direction of his conduct are sufficiently explicit to be understood by all, even the most ignorant; but, there are other parts which require a close application, properly to understand; an attention to the time they were spoken—the characters and circumstances, and even the manners and customs of the persons to whom they are addressed, and the subjects to which they relate, all of which cannot be accomplished but by the aid of that reason, which may with propriety be styled the handmaid of religion.

We are willing, however, to grant to our correspondent, that the unrestrained exercise of reason, on subjects above human comprehension, is apt to lead to infidelity. We are too apt to be blind-

ed by the fond conceit that, because we are endued with intelligence, and ought not to believe *without reason*, we must of course be qualified *to reason out our faith*,—to explain all subjects alike, and to sound the very depths of the divine nature and decrees. This idea, so erroneous in itself, and so pernicious in its tendency, has been a constant source of dissensions among christians themselves, who, not knowing where to stop in their bold and curious researches, have mixed with the beautiful and sublime doctrines of the gospel, the fanciful inventions of their own imaginations.

Editor.

QUESTION.

The bible informs us “that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. Is there a person of any sect, persuasion, or denomination in the world who can with sincerity say, *God will not perform the work?* We are not informed that God was trying, or using his utmost endeavours to reconcile, but that *he was reconciling the world unto himself*. Does not this expression presuppose a consummation of the object? An answer to the above question is solicited by

R.

PREJUDICE.

When it is seen that preachers endeavour to keep their people from investigating a system of Religion, it may be known that they are fearful the investigation would ultimate to their disadvantage; for if a doctrine carries its proof with it, it only needs to be known to obtain credence. Is it not reasonable to suppose then, that these people who cry, licentiousness, heresy, &c. are more afraid of an impartial investigation, than they are of the effects of the doctrine they exclaim against? The reason is obvious why many preachers labour to cherish prejudice.

MORAL AND RELIGIOUS PRECEPTS.

Make Religion the rule of every principle and action. Never do any thing which is contrary to its principles, nor espouse any cause which it will not justify.

Never do any thing of which you are not *certain* it is just and honourable.

In all your dealings be strictly honest, and never for the sake of gain do an unworthy action.

FEMALE PIETY.

’Tis sweet to see the op’ning rose
Spread its fair bosom to the sky,
’Tis sweet to view at twilight’s close,
The heaven’s bespangled canopy.

’Tis sweet, amid the vernal grove,
To hear the Thrush’s fervent lay,
Or lark, that wings his flight above,
To hail the dawning of the day.

But sweeter far is maiden’s eye
Uprais’d to heaven in pious prayer;
When bath’d in tears she looks on high
What sacred eloquence is there.

Oh! sweeter far that sacred name,
“My Father!” utter’d by her tongue,
And sweeter when her heav’nly flame,
Ascends in pious holy song.

Oh! sweet, when on the bended knee,
Her thought, her spirit mounts above,
In pious deep-felt ecstasy,
To realms of everlasting love.

—00—

HYMN.

Father of our feeble race,
Wise, beneficent and kind,
Spread o’er nature’s ample face,
Flows thy goodness unconfined.
Musing in the silent grove,
Or the busy walks of men,
Still we trace thy wond’rous love,
Claiming large returns again.

Lord, what offering shall we bring,
At thine altars when we bow?
Hearts, the pure, unsullied spring,
Whence the kind affections flow;
Soft compassion’s feeling soul,
By the melting eye express’d:
Sympathy, at whose control
Sorrow leaves the wounded breast,

Willing hand to lead the blind,
Bind the wound, or feed the poor:
Love, embracing all mankind;
Charity, with lib’ral store;
Teach us oh! thou heav’nly king,
Thus to shew our grateful mind,
Thus the accepted offerings bring,
Love to thee, and all mankind.

PRINTING

Neatly executed at this Office